brutalities coming from there. I sensed the simple warmth of this great man, the frugality of his living and his human principles, within minutes.

During our stay another memorable incident I recall is that we were invited to a theatrical performance in which prostitutes were professional actresses. Habib Sahib and I were greatly intrigued to learn about this unique theatre form and so agreed to go. What immediately struck me as odd was that one section of the audience was screened off by a wire netting from the stage. On enquiring what purpose that served we were told that the intention was to prevent over-excited men in the audience from reaching the stage. Habib Sahib showed no real anxiety, but rather was all the more game to witness the show. A long time later when I came to know him very closely as a friend, I was able to understand his enjoyment of the situation. Habib Sahib's grandfather was a Pathan. His grandfather hailed from Saidu Sharif in Swat and later migrated to Madhya Pradesh, India.



The writer with Habib Tanvir.

To speak of the great playwright, Habib Tanvir's extraordinary insight and talent reveals two things one, he revived the almost lost treasures of old folk tales and dramatised village performances, which lie at the base of Indian culture and secondly, he transported the wealth of Indian folk acting into the spotlight of the modern stage, infusing pure drama or total drama, to audiences who were seeking their roots. My realisation of Habib Tanvir's greatness as an innovator of a new stage form affected me deeply. His remarkable strength and stature in the face of critics' negative reviews did not stop him from experimenting. The critics thought that he was using gimmicks taken from folk theatre. But Habib knew and believed in what he was doing. He culled out from the treasure house of folk culture a lyrical and rhythmic dialogue-song-dance performance that hinged on contemporary situations, problems of the modern man. It is known that in his early struggle he hardly got any audiences support either.

Habib Tanvir, although a product of the western school of RADA and Bristol Old Vic, was a man of the cultivated class, who had kept company with Bertolt Brecht in East Germany and had staged several plays by Shakespeare and Moliere, remained essentially Indian in his attitude and taste. He was an enigma because he handled both eastern and western expressions with equal ease. "It's all one seamless movement deriving from the experience of life said Peter Brooks about his stage shows. "Habib moves from the specific to the universal and back to the specific with remarkable competence".

In 1982, Peter Brooks visited India and met Habib's Naya Theatre. He said, "They represent and absolute extreme of purity; a peasant company directed by a highly sophisticated man who brings them up to town and takes every conceivable precaution to prevent the town from contaminating them. There are no learnt conversations, no symbolic hand gestures. If you want a tree you stick a foot up in the air. It's pop art, using the vocabulary of natural fun and in that sense the Naya Theatre shows could be from anywhere, but there is something about this part of India that makes them very talented. They are born actors."

Habib Tanvir, the mastermind behind this revolution in Indian Theatre deserves the acclaim he finally received. Tanvir was Brechtian in his handling of the story but his form was uniquely his own. Most interesting was that he made the simple village family theatre part of the bigger world theatre. He had strong socialist beliefs, but no political ambitions. Habib bhai was a very colourful person full of witticisms. His moral strength helped him to overcome difficulties of health, financial strain and even housing. He lived in a two-roomed small government Class IV quarter in Ber Serai outside Delhi for years and never felt it was inadequate. His rehearsals were held in the courtyard. His actors lived with him and Moneeka shared their simple food.

As I pay my last respects dear friends, I say farewell and pray we meet when the contains rise again.